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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 54th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/51/L.69: United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments with the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (A/C.5/51/47)

1. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee on the statement submitted by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/51/47) on the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/51/L.69 relating to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA), recalled that under the terms of the draft resolution, the mandate of the Mission (which would be known as the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala) was to be renewed for a period of one year to carry out international verification of the peace accords in accordance with the recommendations of the Secretary-General, and that the latter would be requested to continue to develop appropriate means to identify resources for the Mission within the limits of the approved budget for the current biennium and to submit to the General Assembly a report with his recommendations on the structure and staffing of the Mission after 31 March 1998.

2. The signing of the Agreement on the Implementation, Compliance and Verification Timetable for the Peace Agreements and the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace had brought into effect all the agreements reached between the parties since 1994. That package of agreements constituted a blueprint for peace, reconciliation and development, the calendar for the implementation of which, in three separate phases, was set out in the Agreement on the Implementation, Compliance and Verification Timetable. As requested by the parties, the duration of the Mission's mandate would be the same as that of the Timetable, namely four years from 1997 to 2000.

3. The Advisory Committee noted that the estimate of $21,013,000 contained in the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications had been calculated on the basis of a renewal of the Mission's mandate for a period of one year until 31 March 1998, as indicated in the draft resolution. However, there was sufficient indication that the Mission could continue until the end of the year 2000. On enquiry, the Advisory Committee had been informed that the Secretary-General envisaged submitting budgetary proposals if the mandate of the Mission was again extended.

4. Moreover, by its resolution 1094 (1997), the Security Council had authorized for a three-month period the attachment to MINUGUA of a group of military observers for the purposes of verification of the Agreement on a Definitive Ceasefire. In its report on the subject (A/51/826), the Advisory Committee had recommended that the General Assembly should approve the appropriation and assessment of the amount of $4 million gross ($3,956,300 net) for the period from 15 February to 31 May 1997 for 142 military and 30 civilian

personnel. The Advisory Committee understood that the estimates in the statement submitted by the Secretary-General had been prepared on the assumption that the activities of the Military Observer Group attached to MINUGUA would cease on 31 May 1997. That being the case, the Advisory Committee expected that the vehicles, communications and other equipment and supplies being utilized by the Group would revert to the Mission and that, to the extent possible, additional resources would not be expended for that purpose.

5. The staffing table of the restructured MINUGUA showed a net addition of 11 international Professional staff and an increase of 59 local-level staff, offset by a net reduction of 8 staff in the General Service and Field Service categories. In all, the Mission would comprise 129 international staff, 199 local-level staff and 106 United Nations Volunteers. After receiving additional information about the structure of the office, the Advisory Committee felt that it appeared to be unnecessarily complex. It requested that the structure of the Mission be reviewed with a view to streamlining it and that the possibility of combining units so as to reduce supervisory functions as well as the support staff required should be explored. It also trusted that the utmost care would be taken to avoid duplication of activities, and cautioned against the temptation to try, out of a concern for equality, to staff all the units at the same level.

6. The Advisory Committee also noted that, in the context of their participation along with international agencies and the specialized agencies of the United Nations in the peace process in Guatemala, donors had pledged assistance totalling some $1.9 billion for activities from 1997 and 2000 (A/51/828, para. 5). In view of that, the Advisory Committee believed that efforts should be made to obtain expertise from organizations within the United Nations and to seek funding for such requirements from the funds being made available by the international community. Moreover, it regretted that the Secretary-General's statement did not clearly indicate the role of other United Nations agencies and programmes vis-à-vis MINUGUA, and did not reflect the extrabudgetary resources available to the Mission. On enquiry, it had been informed that the Trust Fund for the Guatemalan Peace Process had a balance of $5 million, and had been financing consultancy services. The Advisory Committee recommended in that respect that further efforts should be made to finance expert and consultancy services through that Fund rather than from regular budget resources. It reiterated its request that the Secretary-General's report should contain detailed information on the utilization of the Trust Fund and other extrabudgetary resources. In addition, future budget reports on MINUGUA should follow a format similar to that used for peacekeeping operations.

7. The Advisory Committee reiterated its views on the utilization of United Nations Volunteers for providing, at a relatively low cost, a wide range of services in peacekeeping and other missions. It recommended that the possibility of placing some international staff with volunteers should be further explored.

8. The Advisory Committee noted that existing staff resources of MINUGUA had been provided on a temporary assistance basis in recognition of the time-limited and non-recurrent nature of the political mandate of the Mission. The Secretary-General proposed continuing to utilize that mechanism for the balance

of the Mission's mandate. In addition, an approximately 22 per cent delayed recruitment factor had been applied to the cost of salaries and common staff costs in respect of 10 of the new Professional staff requested.

9. With regard to the rental of premises, the Advisory Committee had been informed that the amount of $175,000 estimated for alteration work to consolidate all of the headquarters units within one building would only be expended if the United Nations found, within the international community, a suitable renter for one of the buildings currently occupied by MINUGUA.

10. Having been informed that it was intended to fund the additional requirements for MINUGUA from savings resulting from more favourable rates of exchange than anticipated, as in 1996, the Advisory Committee wished to point out that the situation would not remain favourable indefinitely, and it would not be prudent to rely solely on a solution of that kind to finance mandated activities. It also noted that the provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/213 continued to apply, including those dealing with additional expenditures related to peace and security, and that the General Assembly had previously indicated that activities such as those for MINUGUA should be financed without affecting the implementation of existing programmes and mandates. In that connection, bearing in mind that the Mission was to continue until the end of the year 2000, the Advisory Committee expected that the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 would include resources for the financing of MINUGUA.

11. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/51/L.69, the Secretary-General should be authorized to enter into commitments of up to $21,013,000 under section 3 of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997; an additional commitment authority of $1,822,600 would also be required under section 32 (Staff assessment), to be offset by the same amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment. Requirements for adjustment of the existing appropriation would be submitted in the context of the final performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

12. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that, although paragraph 4 of the statement submitted by the Secretary-General indicated that the mandate of MINUGUA was to last four years, ending in the year 2000, the estimated requirements did not extend beyond 31 March 1998. If the Mission were to continue on a long-term basis, that fact should be taken into account at the budgetary level. Her delegation therefore hoped that the Secretariat would indicate how it intended to maintain the Mission's activities until the year 2000. She also questioned the wording of paragraph 27 of the document: bearing in mind the provisions of resolution 41/213, which the General Assembly had since reaffirmed on several occasions, she asked whether it was a question of a commitment authority or one of additional appropriations?

13. Mr. HALBWACHS (Controller) said that the perspective for the budget estimates was based on paragraph 5 of the draft resolution, pursuant to which the mandate of MINUGUA would be renewed for a period of one year, until 31 March 1998. It was indeed a question of an activity which should be long-

term, but the General Assembly itself had decided not to provide a budgetary package to finance possible missions whose nature was still unknown at the time of adoption of the general budget plan. Moreover, the approach adopted was not contrary to the principles contained in General Assembly resolution 41/213, since it was not a question of interrupting or reducing other activities with a view to freeing resources needed to finance MINUGUA. Instead, it merely involved entering into a commitment of up to $21,013,000 and returning to the question when the budget performance report was being considered. Furthermore, in view of the current exchange rate movement, it could be reasonably hoped that the appropriations made by the Assembly would be sufficient and that requests for further appropriations would be unnecessary.

14. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that the explanations given by the Controller were unacceptable to anyone who remembered the political debate which had led to consideration of the general plan. Her question had been prompted by the fact that paragraph 4 of the document submitted by the Secretary-General unequivocally stated that the Mission should continue until the year 2000: the reply given was therefore unacceptable. Moreover, in compliance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/213, MINUGUA activities should be financed by additional appropriations, without there being any need to await the budget performance report in order to decide how they should be financed. The Secretariat should not regard decisions which could later be taken by the General Assembly as already having been agreed, particularly bearing in mind the exchange rate movement.

15. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should adopt the following decision: "Should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/51/L.69, the Secretary-General would be authorized to enter into commitments of $21,013,000 under section 3 of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. An additional commitment authority of $1,822,600 would also be required under section 32, Staff assessment, to be offset by the same amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment. Related requirements for adjustment of the existing appropriation would be submitted in the context of the final performance report of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 to be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session."

16. Mrs. SHENWICK (United States of America) said that the words "where necessary" should be added to the final sentence to make it clear that it referred to possible adjustments.

17. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that she strongly disapproved of the form which the Secretariat had given to her request; in her view, the Committee's decision should stress additional appropriations and not a commitment authority. However, she did not wish to hold back the discussion and wanted to facilitate the negotiations. She therefore believed that the wording of the decision read out by the Chairman should be adopted, since it left open the possible need for additional appropriations.

18. Mr. MENKVELD (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, pointed out that the document before the Committee had been submitted in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. Under General Assembly resolution 41/213, the Secretary-General should endeavour

to meet the proposed expenditures by achieving savings in the programme budget, although without in any way compromising programme implementation. The European Union attached great importance, on the one hand, to the intended objectives of the draft resolution and the continued work of MINUGUA and, on the other, to the principles established by General Assembly resolution 41/213. It therefore approved the measures suggested in paragraphs 26 and 27 of document A/C.5/51/47, but proposed that the final sentence of the draft decision should be amended by replacing the words "related requirements for adjustment" with the wording contained in the said document, namely: "any related requirements for adjustment".

19. Mrs. SHENWICK (United States of America) said that that solution appeared to be even better than the one which she had proposed.

20. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) requested the Chairman to suspend the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 3.45 p.m. and resumed at 4 p.m.

21. The CHAIRMAN suggested adopting the draft decision with an amendment to the final sentence, which would read: "In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 41/213, any related requirements for adjustment of the existing appropriation would be presented in the final performance report of the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 to be presented to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session".

It was so decided.

22. Mrs. SHENWICK (United States of America) stressed that her country expected that the expenditures would be financed entirely within the limits of the appropriations made under the programme budget.

23. Mrs. PEÑA (Mexico) drew attention to paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, which requested the Secretary-General to continue to develop appropriate means to identify resources for the Mission within the limits of the approved budget for the current biennium. Her delegation believed that, once that text was adopted, the Secretariat would be in a position to include under section 3 of the draft programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 the budget estimates relating to the continuation of MINUGUA activities after 31 March 1998.

24. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation had not opposed adoption of the decision because it believed that it was understood, on the one hand, that the Secretariat would submit the desired proposals on the financing of the Mission's activities and, on the other, that the decision would have no implications for programme implementation. The Mexican delegation had also been right to draw attention to paragraph 6 of the draft resolution and the fact that, when envisaging new activities, it was important to take into account the budget situation and the limitations which it imposed. Finally, her delegation hoped that, in the future, the Secretariat would submit its budget documents in accordance with the practice followed thus far.

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25. Mrs. INCERA (Costa Rica) returned to the question of the maintenance of the garage and the lack of available parking places for delegations. She wished to know how the Secretariat intended to remedy the situation, and, in particular, if it intended to seek funds in order to carry out the necessary repair work to the ceiling. She also wished to know why, when the Secretary-General had been delivering his statement on the reform of the Organization, the microphones had been turned off and the Committee had met in private without having been consulted, contrary to rule 60 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

26. The CHAIRMAN said that the questions raised by the Costa Rican delegation would be answered in due course.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.